



U.S. General Services Administration



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Monday, October 3, 2005

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For Immediate Release

Ceremonial Groundbreaking Held for African Burial Ground Memorial: National Park Service Releases Management Recommendations for Site

NEW YORK – On Wednesday, September 28th, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and architect Rodney Léon, celebrated a ceremonial groundbreaking to mark the site of the African Burial Ground memorial in New York City.

The event included the participation of local high school students, members of the faith community, the diplomatic corps, local, national and foreign leaders, and government officials. Participants in the event, assisted by local school children, marked the ground by placing banners bearing the Sankofa symbol around a section of the area where the memorial will be sited.

Speaking to the crowd, GSA Administrator Stephen A. Perry commented: “Today we mark the ground where the African Burial Ground memorial will be built, and where it will stand forever as a monument to the 17th and 18th century enslaved Africans who rest here. The memorial will educate visitors about the harsh living conditions under which they toiled, the customs they added to our culture, and the many contributions they made to colonial America.” Perry, along with Donald W. Murphy, Deputy Director of the National Parks Service, also introduced and recognized the memorial design advisors who attended the ceremony.

Perry also announced that the Secretary of the Interior was in the process of reviewing the site regarding potentially recommending to the President of the United States that it be declared a National Monument.

The formal rite and blessing followed the announcement by Murphy of the NPS' release of its draft recommendations for management of the site. "The National Park Service has been privileged to assist with the memorialization and planning for the future of the African Burial Ground" said Murphy. "In working with the descendant African community and others, the National Park Service has prepared Draft Recommendations for the African Burial Ground. We look forward to receiving public comment on the draft recommendations for this National Historic Landmark." The report is available online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov> or at www.africanburialground.gov.

Although he was not able to attend the September 28th ceremony, Congressman Charles B. Rangel of New York's 15th Congressional District, a strong supporter of this project, has stated: "This beautiful memorial is of national and international significance for those of us who are African Americans as well as other people of African descent worldwide. It will stand as a permanent symbol of our caring and concern that our ancestors buried here receive their just recognition and respect."

During the event Howard Dodson also announced the Schomburg's annual *African Burial Ground: Celebration of the Ancestral Heritage Weekend*, September 30-October 2, describing the Weekend – which is free to the public– as a "multicultural, world tribute" to the African Burial Ground.

This year, the Heritage Weekend focused on "Meditations on Compassion and Healing" acknowledging those whose lives have been ravaged by Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast, the Niger famine and Haiti suffering. Highlights included a Youth Assembly & Ring Shout Ceremony with 1500 students; drumming and Jazz tributes, Russell Simmons Def Poetry, Open Mic presentations, and appearances by such artists as Wyclef Jean, Phylicia Rashad, MC Lyte, Taye Diggs and cast members from Broadway's "Drumstruck", among others.

For more information on the African Burial Ground project, the exterior memorial, the NPS' draft recommendations for management of the site and the Ancestral Heritage Weekend, visit the African Burial Ground project website at: www.africanburialground.gov .

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"...for all those who are not forgotten..."—Rodney Léon